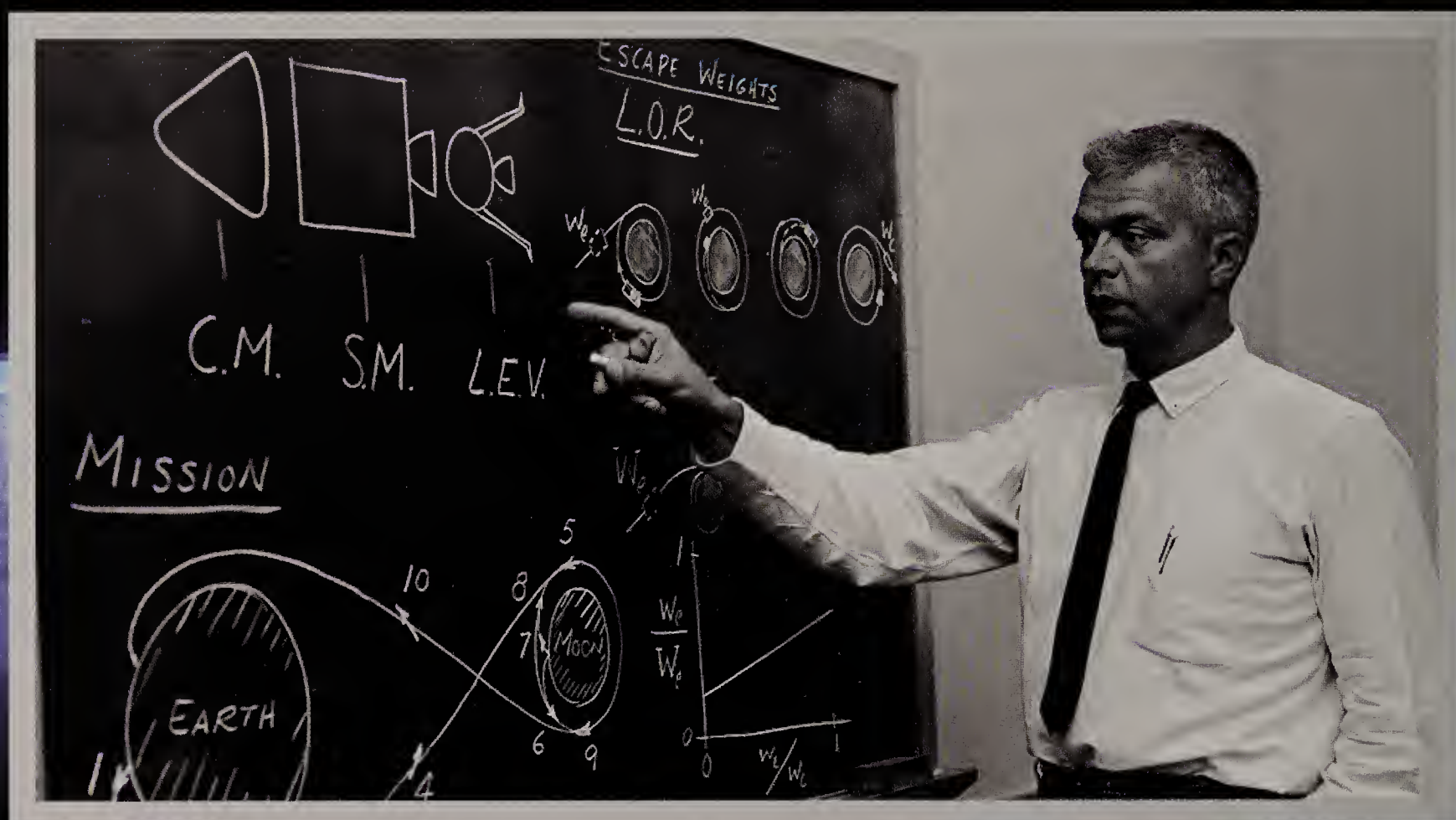


IN MEMORIAM: JOHN HOUBOLT

Famous Alum and NASA Engineer Made His Mark on JJC



If it weren't for Joliet Junior College alumnus John Houbolt, Neil Armstrong may have never uttered his now infamous words: "One small step for man... one giant leap for mankind."

A 1938 JJC graduate, Houbolt went on to great success with his behind-the-scenes work that ultimately propelled mankind to the moon in 1969. Among his many accomplishments, NASA.gov credits Houbolt as one of the great unsung heroes of the agency's Apollo program. The JJC community was saddened to learn of Houbolt's passing at the age of 95 on April 15, 2014 due to complications from Parkinson's disease in Scarborough, Maine.

According to the college's 1938 yearbook, *The J.C.*, as a student, Houbolt studied civil engineering and

participated in the College Club. After completing his studies at JJC, he received his bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering from the University of Illinois in Champaign in the 1940s, and a doctorate from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology at Zurich in 1957.

Houbolt began working for NASA (then NACA) at one of the agency's first field centers, the Langley Research Center in Hampton Va., in 1942. In November 1961, Houbolt boldly wrote a nine-page letter to NASA Associate Administrator Dr. Robert Seamans about the company's plans to land a man on the moon. Houbolt's letter advocated using the Lunar Orbit Rendezvous (LOR) method to travel to the moon. In the letter, Houbolt famously posed the question, "Do we want to go to the moon or not?"

Thanks to Houbolt and his strong support of LOR, the 1969 moon landing not only proved to be successful – but it was economical and saved time. According to retired JJC professor Robert Sterling's book, *Joliet Junior College: A Pictorial History of*

America's Oldest Public Community College," Houbolt estimated that his plan saved the United States \$20 billion and accelerated the moon landing by roughly three years.

Two months after the 1969 moon landing, Sterling's book said the city of Joliet invited Houbolt back to the area for "John Houbolt Day," on Sept. 18, 1969. Houbolt and his family attended, and were paraded down the streets of Joliet. They also attended a luncheon that included 600 people. At the luncheon, JJC representatives and Joliet Mayor Maurice Berlinsky spoke of their plans to rename Airport Road in Houbolt's honor.

Just a few years after Houbolt Road was named, Houbolt came back to JJC as the principal speaker for the new JJC campus dedication ceremony on Oct. 22, 1972. The college honored Houbolt again in 1986 with an Alumni Achievement Award.

In addition to Houbolt Road, the city of Joliet has also honored Houbolt with a mural, located near the Joliet Union Station, which illustrates Houbolt's work for NASA and the LOR method.

To honor his memory, the Houbolt family invites the community to donate to the JJC Foundation in John C. Houbolt's name. For more information on how to donate, call the JJC Foundation at 815-280-2353.



John Houbolt as a JJC student in 1938



John Houbolt was honored with a parade through Joliet in September 1969